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CIA Reactions

SIR: Your thorough and revealing news coverage of Tom Braden's defense of the CIA's program of subsidizing private organizations reveals an almost unbelievable attitude of contempt for Congress on the part of the highest officials in one of the most powerful agencies of the United States government.

Mr. Braden asks, "Was it immoral, wrong, disgraceful? Only in the sense that war itself is immoral, wrong, and disgraceful, for the cold war was a war fought with ideas instead of bombs."

Whether or not it be immoral, wrong, or disgraceful, isn't it wrong for one branch of the executive division of our government to willfully and deliberately spend scores of millions of taxpayers' dollars contrary to their own understanding even of the intent of Congress? For as Mr. Braden brashly admits, the CIA operated in flagrant violation of their own knowledge of the intent of Congress. He states, "Back in the early nineteen fifties the idea that Congress would have approved our project was about as likely as the John Birch Society's approving medicare."

Braden attempts to justify "undercover methods" by indicating that the end justifies the means and judges that dire events might have happened in Europe if it hadn't been for the CIA waging its own self-declared war of ideas. Well, no one knows for sure what might have happened in Europe if the CIA had not declared its own little war. We do know, however, that it was only after the CIA had been forcibly ousted from Indonesia that the Indonesians then turned and met their own internal problems by themselves head-on and ousted the Communists. We do know what happened when the CIA was given the dominant role in the greatest fiasco in modern American history—the Bay of Pigs. We do know what has happened in Vietnam since the CIA appropriated millions of dollars through the front of Michigan State University to install and secure Diem as Premier of Vietnam. And we do know what has happened to the reputation of American private organizations, educational and otherwise, who have long pretended that they are democratic private organizations whose point of view is their own when in fact they have accepted the funds and thereby the control and policy orientation required by the CIA of those who accept their money.

Personally I applaud the President's action in directing that the CIA mind its own business and stay out of subverting and corrupting private organizations. We want no more Bays of Pigs; we want no more Vietnams. We do want to stand and fight for freedom but with our own ideas—our own concepts and principles of representative government.

Elliott H. Newcomb

Bethesda, Md.

SIR: There is something infinitely sad about your recent editorial deploring Thomas W. Braden's revelation that the CIA did indeed secretly finance the international activities of certain leaders of the American labor movement. The almost ineffable feeling of sadness comes from your insistence that the CIA "accomplished its purpose without seriously compromising the free institutions of this nation." Just what sort of ethical bookkeeping is it that keeps you from recognizing political hypocrisy when it is under your nose? Can you remember the shouting, loud and long, about the immorality of Moscow gold? The United States was above that sort of thing. Now it seems that the shouting was for the purpose of drowning out the gurgling of a stream that constantly flowed out of Fort Knox and always underground.

If what has happened to the many student, cultural, and labor organizations has not seriously compromised them, then what in God's name could?

Nat. Einhorn.

Brooklyn, N.Y.

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SIR: As pointed out in your editorial, irreparable damage has been caused "now that those channels of activity, once put to proper and effective use by the intelligence agency, have been destroyed." The loss to the American taxpayers has been immeasurable in terms of the painstaking work which was involved in developing a cover mechanism for this and similar covert funding operations.

Still, the CIA can blame itself for having started the avalanche of revelations and for the poor image resulting from these wholesale exposures. The agency became its own worst enemy when it violated basic principles of clandestine action by needlessly exposing some of its surplus covert agents in the wake of the Bay of Pigs fiasco, in order to placate the "head hunters" of the New Frontier. Also, by permitting certain favored elements within its own ranks to practice nefarious tradecraft on non-OSS types, the agency sowed the seeds for a harvest of criticisms.

Any organization which "bites off its nose to spite its face" is bound to look ugly to outsiders. Usually, anybody who displays his dirty linen in public deserves the ridicule of his neighbors.

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